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ABSTRACT

This study is one of the first large-scale investigations of existing selection criteria and procedures in university principal-preparation programs. Over 450 university master's degree and principal-certification programs in education administration were reviewed. The results are discouraging. Except for a few bright spots revealing rigorous and quality selection procedures, the majority of university preparation programs utilize criteria neither remarkable nor characterized by validity and reliability. In a field (education administration) where great energy is expended to develop "best practices" and "innovative strategies" for schools and students, it is noteworthy that assumptions behind current selection criteria for principals and other administrators are underdeveloped and go unchallenged. If one wishes to improve practice in P-12 schools, an obvious place to start is study of innovative selection procedures within existing principal-preparation programs. The authors of this study believe that one of the most important steps a university can take to positively impact education is to better identify appropriate candidates for these programs. Appendix A contains an example audition scenario in an education administration preparation program, discussion of its relevance, and an Irate Parent Call Assessment Form with comments. (Contains 24 references.) (Author/RT)

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Selection or Self-Selection? How Rigorous are the Selection Criteria in Education Administration Programs?

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Abstract

The present study is one of the first large-scale investigations of existing selection criteria and procedures in university principal preparation programs. Over 450 university master's degree and principal certification programs in education administration were reviewed. The results are discouraging. Except for a few bright spots revealing rigorous and quality selection procedures, the majority of university preparation programs utilize criteria neither remarkable nor characterized by validity and reliability. In a field (education administration) where great energy is expended to develop "best practices" and "innovative strategies" for schools and students, it is noteworthy that assumptions behind current selection criteria for principals and other administrators are not only underdeveloped, but basically unchallenged. If one wishes to improve practice in P-12 schools, an obvious place to start is found within the development of future principals and other administrators at universities. A plethora of opportunities exist at Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) for study of innovative selection procedures within existing principal preparation programs. The authors of this study believe that one of the most important steps a university can take to positively impact education is to better identify appropriate candidates for these programs.

Introduction

Effective education leadership programs consist both of program experiences and the quality of entering candidates. The selection of candidates is fully as critical as the preparation program itself. After 40 years of continued alerts (AASA, 1960; Creighton, 2001; Farqchar & Piele, 1972; Murphy, 1999; NPBEA, 1989; Pitner, 1990), the field of education administration still has serious problems in the ways candidates are selected into education leadership programs.

A review of the empirical research related to candidate selection in education administration programs reveals: (a) a scarcity of comprehensive studies and (b) the utilization of excessively small sample sizes (e.g., Murphy, 1999; Pounder & Young,

1996). With more than 500 existing universities and colleges preparing principals (and others appearing overnight via distance learning), a dire need exists for a meta-analysis of selection criteria used.

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) published *Improving the Preparation of School Administrators* (1989), a bulletin emphasizing the need to strengthen the procedures used to identify and select students into education administration programs. They recommended that:

> ...entrance standards to administrator preparation programs be dramatically raised to ensure that all candidates possess strong analytical ability, high administrative potential, and demonstrated success in teaching. (NPBEA, 1989, p.5)

There is some evidence that a more proactive stance to the selection of potential school leaders in the nation's university preparation programs has taken place over the last decade. Murphy (1999) states that selective measures have expanded beyond the traditional to include assessment center activities and interviews. Looking closely at Murphy's research, one can identify two potential issues related to validity and reliability. First, not only were the sample sizes relatively small (N = 44), but data were collected from department chairs from a rather elite group of institutions. University programs reviewed were members of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA). At the time of Murphy's study, UCEA membership included 54 universities. The quality of preparation program at UCEA institutions is not in question. But it is noteworthy to add that membership is cost prohibitive to many universities, and UCEA membership represents only approximately one-tenth of university preparation programs.

Research on selection criteria ought to reflect and include the approximate 500 universities who prepare a significantly higher number of principal candidates. To repeat, the quality of program at UCEA institutions or non-UCEA schools is not in question here. The issue relates to the small, highly selective group of institutions studied.

The second concern of Murphy's findings relates to the question of whether or not department chairs are the most accurate source of valid and reliable data. Creighton and Jones (2001) found conflicting information in regards to selection criteria depending on the person supplying such data. Department chairs were found to supply more positive responses in regards to the rigor and quality of candidate selection. Reviewing university catalogs, and interviewing program directors, college deans, secretaries, and individual university professors, revealed some discrepancy with department chairs' descriptions of existing university selection procedures and practices. At several institutions "special circumstances" allowing inclusion of otherwise unqualified individuals into programs were commonly applied throughout the selection process.

Upon a more thorough inspection of a larger sample (N = 450) however, the majority of universities still rely primarily on Graduate Record Examination scores, letters of recommendation, and grade point averages (Creighton & Jones, 2001). Evidence of the use of strategies focused on "analytical ability, high administrative potential, and demonstrated success in teaching" was minimal at best.

University preparation programs are under pressure to take in adequate numbers of candidates to justify the program's costs and existence (Sarason, 1999). This pressure results in admitting individuals of borderline quality, with a continued dependence on

traditional selection criteria such as Graduate Record Examination scores, grade point average, and letters of recommendation. With the projection of approximately 50 per cent of current school administrators leaving the nation's public schools in the next decade (Harris, Arnold, Lowery, & Crocker, 2000), it is more than crucial that universities attract and select high quality candidates to school administration preparation programs. This study warns that no aspect of a university's principal preparation program is more damaging than a ubiquitous reputation for being a refuge for mediocre candidates.

The Problem

The field of education administration has long been criticized for the ways in which men and women are prepared for school leadership positions. In 1960, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) characterized the preparation of superintendents and principals as a "dismal montage" (Murphy, 1999, p. 84). Later Farquhar and Piele (1972) described university-based preparation programs as "dysfunctional structural incrementalism" (p. 17). As recently as 1990, Pitner discussed the "zombie programs" (p. 131) in educational administration.

The problem relates to how we select our prospective school administrators for our university preparation programs. The most common selection strategies accept future administrators into programs under three criteria: (a) Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, (b) grade point average, and (c) letters of recommendation, with little evidence of consistent standards of acceptance. Recent research has identified the criteria weighted most heavily in the selection of candidates as the GRE score (Norton, 1994).

The present study finds the same practices in place today, with little change in selection criteria.

A secondary problem is whether or not current admission standards are sufficiently high to attract the "brightest and most capable candidates" to our programs (Norton, 1994, p. 41). Data published in the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Guide (2001) reveal that students entering education administration preparation programs from 1996 to 1999 attained GRE scores ranking third from the bottom when compared with forty-one graduate fields. Compared with seven specific education majors, education administration ranked second from the bottom in verbal reasoning, third from the bottom in quantitative reasoning, and second from the bottom in analytical reasoning.

The present use of GRE scores, undergraduate grade point averages, and letters of recommendation for the selection of candidates for school administration in isolation are not in question – they have their place – but when they are the sole basis for selection, they are and have been found to be only partially effective (Sarason, 1999). Although various selection criteria are used, the dominant one is Graduate Record Examination scores; only limited attention is given to factors associated directly with administrative potential (Creighton & Jones, 2001).

The lack of rigorous selection procedures has several potentially negative effects:

1. Weak selection processes lower the quality of instruction offered, since courses and instruction are often geared to the background and intelligence of the students;
2. Easy entry diminishes the status of education administration programs in the eyes of the public;

3. The candidates themselves realize that anyone can get the credential if he or she keeps paying for credits; (Cooper & Boyd, 1987, p. 14) and
4. Low standards of admissions permit and encourage enrollment of candidates interested only in a master's degree in education with little intent of vigorously pursuing an administration position. (Creighton & Jones, 2001)

Increasing the level of selection will likely result in a higher quality of administrator prepared by IHEs, thus providing better principals and superintendents for the nation's schools. Many studies point to the importance of quality leaders (Fullan, 1994; Sarason, 1995; Sergiovani, 1996; Schlecty, 1997), and support exists for the stance that no amount of significant education reform or restructuring will occur without strong effective school leadership. The prediction that as many as 50 percent of school administrators in the nation will leave their positions in the next decade due to retirement and career change translates to the potential of replacing approximately half of the education leaders in our country in a relatively short period of time. Emphasizing that strong effective leaders throughout the nation have a direct effect on student achievement and organizational change, the impact on and potential for implementing major education reform is immense. If such a number of school administrators are replaced in the next decade, a *window of opportunity* exists to radically improve the quality of education. Improving the selection of school administrators must become a higher priority in all university preparation programs. How will the greater education community respond to this need for numbers? Will IHEs address the supply and demand with current selection processes , or will they focus on the opportunity to improve quality and effectiveness in education? If the latter, education leaders must be certain that university selection

procedures are rigorous, effective, and cost efficient. A specific fear is the possibility that universities might even lower standards of admission to accommodate the growing need for candidates allowing the issue of supply and demand to undercut the quality of prospective school leaders admitted to education administration programs.

Purpose of the Study

It is not the purpose of this paper to suggest the elimination or a de-emphasizing of the commonly used methods of selection such as GRE scores, GPA, and letters of recommendation. Attention is drawn to the results of the present study revealing the use of these methods as the sole basis for selection to the exclusion of somewhat more reliable measures – assessment center activities, situational interviews, teaching experience, and more specifically, the audition. The authors suggest a potentially more effective approach to candidate selection, including a wide variety of traditional and non-traditional practices.

The purpose of the study was to: (a) determine the extent to which rigorous selection processes exist and (b) identify exemplary models resulting in the selection of candidates possessing strong qualifications and characteristics of school leadership.

The specific research question relates to whether admission standards are sufficiently high to attract and identify candidates of diverse race, ethnicity, and gender who are likely to succeed in this challenging field.

Methodology

To identify colleges and universities with education administration programs, several data sources were consulted. The Eighteenth Edition of the Educational Administration Directory (Lane, 2000) identified approximately 350 university programs

preparing school principals. The researchers identified an additional 100 education administration university programs through two Internet web sites: (1) http://www.liuxueguide.com and (2) http://www.gradschools.com. The admissions and selection procedures of universities in all geographic regions were analyzed, including: (a) Western Plains, (b) Mid-eastern, (c) Mid-Atlantic, (d) North-eastern, (e) South-eastern, (f) Mid-south, and (g) Western.

Individual university web sites were visited accessing graduate school catalogs (admissions criteria) and any additional specific requirements from individual departments of education administration. Of the 450 universities analyzed, a 10% purposeful sample (N=45) was selected for follow-up personal communication. Deans of graduate schools, department chairs, and other department personnel were asked to verify data collected from graduate school catalogs and web sites.

Data collected included the following variables:

1. Name of university
2. Bachelors degree required
3. Undergraduate GPA
4. Graduate GPA
5. GRE and/or MAT requirement
6. Combination admissions formulas
7. Letters of recommendation
8. Writing sample
9. Provisional admission
10. Teaching experience (years)

11. Interview

12. Assessment center activities

The study utilized a descriptive research method, collecting descriptions of education administration programs in regards to selection and admission criteria. In data analysis, measures of central tendency (mean), measures of variability (standard deviation), and percentages were reported. It was not the intent of the researchers to imply cause and effect, as in a causal-comparative design, where relationships between variables are studied. The researchers' desire is to provide statistical information of interest to educators and policy makers in administrative preparation programs. Certainly, a next step might include further research of the nature of causal-comparative or correlation studies.

Results

Finding 1

The most frequent combination of selection criteria were:

1. Bachelors degree from an accredited college or university
2. Undergraduate grade point average
3. Graduate Record Examination scores (Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning)
4. Letters of recommendation (2-3)
5. Goals/Purpose statement

Discussion

Within these criteria, the researchers found a wide variance existing in each. For example, though 100% of the universities required a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, only 3% (15) required the degree to be in education or one strong

in the liberal arts. One might suspect a degree in education would be helpful in preparing school administrators, but apparently this is not presently an issue with graduate schools and departments of education administration. This is not to suggest that candidates with other than education degrees should be eliminated from the pool, but departments might benefit from considering the education major as part of the selection criteria.

More discrepancy exists in regards to required undergraduate grade point averages. Table 1 displays the distribution of universities and departments and their accompanying requirements:

Table 1

Undergraduate Grade Point Average Requirements

Undergraduate GPA	Number of Universities	Percent of Total N (450)
3.0 or higher	194	43%
2.75 or higher	124	28%
2.5 or higher	132	29%

In addition, all universities listing a requirement for graduate grade point average stated a requirement of 3.0 or higher.

The most commonly used criterion with regards to the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is a combined cut-off verbal and quantitative score of 1000, though many listed cut-off scores as low as 700. Approximately 52% (234) of the universities state specific cut-off requirements in either the GRE or Millers Analogy Test (MAT). The authors discuss this subject in greater detail later in this paper. Approximately 2%

(9) of the universities reviewed use a combination formula rather than a specific cut-off for the GRE. For example, one university uses the formula: 200 X GPA + GRE (V and Q) = 1500, allowing for a GPA as low as 2.5, accompanied by a V and Q total of 1000. The other 8 universities use a similar formula, with a slightly different beginning number, one of which requires the Verbal and Analytical components in the formula.

Only two universities require the analytical reasoning score in their selection criteria. When interviewed, these higher education administrators reported their belief in a relationship between analytical reasoning skills and leadership potential. Four universities allow the option of using the quantitative or analytical score in the selection process. The authors recommend strongly the need for additional research and validity and reliability studies to further investigate the possible relationship between analytical scores and leadership potential, especially in the light of the NPBEA recommendation (1989) that candidates "possess strong analytical ability." Of special note is the fact that ETS has recently announced the addition of a written analytical reasoning component to the GRE examination in October 2002 (Houston Chronicle, July 2, 2001, p.4).

The most prevalent criteria used currently in the selection of candidates in education administration preparation programs is the use of the Graduate Record Examination score. Though many universities use the GRE score in combination with other factors such as letters of recommendation, undergraduate grade point average, and writing samples, still more than half (52%) state specific cut-off points required for admission (e.g., V + Q = 1000). Evidence exists indicating some graduate schools and departments of education administration initiate the cut-off to expedite the admissions process due to tight schedules and insufficient staffing (Educational Testing Service,

1995). This is especially noteworthy due to the fact that both ETS and the GRE program specifically warn against setting such arbitrary cut-off points.

Why Not 1000? Applicants whose scores fall below an arbitrary cut-off often are given little or no consideration in the admissions process. Figure 1, based on GRE examinees from the 1993-94 testing year (N=417 K) and published by the ETS illustrates why it is inadvisable to routinely disregard applicants whose combined verbal and quantitative scores fall below 1000.

Figure 1 presents the percent of ethnic subgroup members in particular who are disadvantaged by a combined verbal and quantitative cut-off of 1000. As shown, 86% of African American examinees have combined scores below 1000; 76% of Puerto Ricans score below 1000; and 69% of Mexican Americans and 61% of American Indian and Hispanic examinees score below 1000.

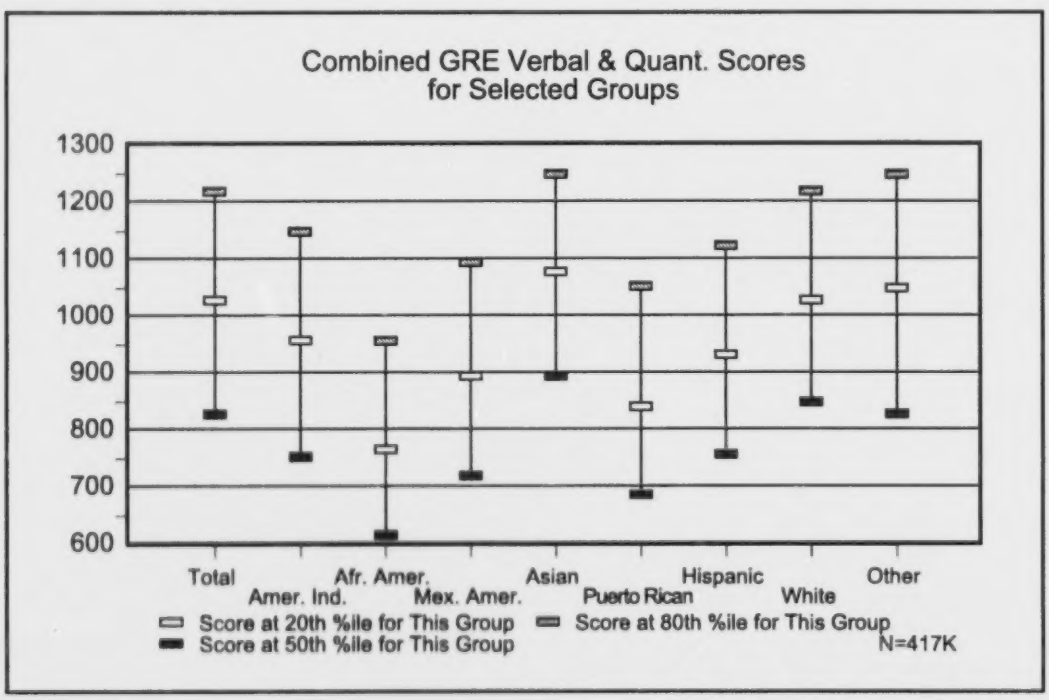

Figure 1. Combined GRE verbal and quantitative scores for selected groups.

In only three subgroups – those who describe themselves as White, Asian American, or Other – does a cut-off point of 1000 discount less than half of the population. Approximately 45% of White examinees, 43% of Other examinees, and 38% of Asian American examinees fall below the combined verbal and quantitative score of 1000.

Figure 2 shows a combined score performance for subgroups of citizenship and gender. Data on citizenship reveal a larger percentage of U.S. citizens (48%) than non-U.S. citizens (39%) fall below the 1000 cut-off. Concerning gender, 55% of females had combined scores of less than 1000, while only 35% of males did.

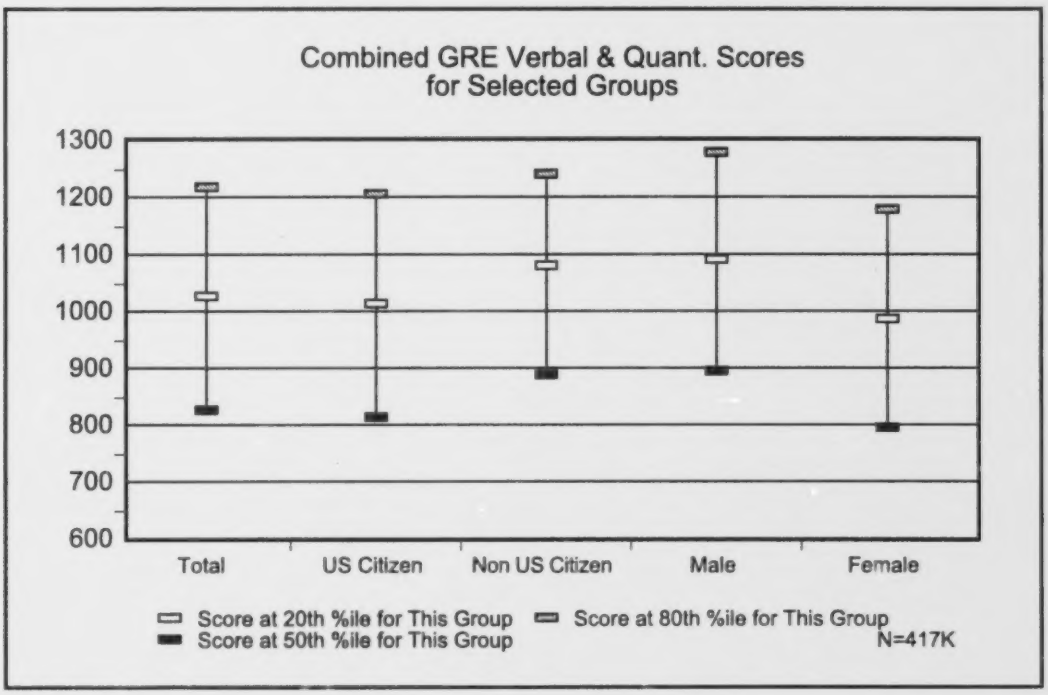

Figure 2. Combined GRE verbal and quantitative scores for selected groups.

Clearly, large numbers of prospective graduate students in a variety of subgroups are adversely affected by a cut-off score policy. Combining any two or three scores (V,

Q, A) presents a special problem: Candidates may have acceptable, even commendable, scores in one area considered important to success in education leadership (such as verbal reasoning), but their score in the other area (such as quantitative reasoning), that may be less related to success in education administration, may be keeping them out of consideration. For example, a candidate could potentially have a verbal score of 800 (perfect), but a score of 150 in quantitative, and not meet the cut-off criteria.

Recommendations

The authors are not suggesting the elimination of the GRE from the criteria used to select education leadership candidates. GRE scores are certainly an important measure for consideration in selecting prospective school leaders. The danger lies in their inappropriate use: either as a sole criteria or in conjunction with a set cut-off score. It is recommended, however, that further research be conducted investigating any relationship between leadership potential and results of the analytical section of the GRE. The authors also recommend discontinuance of the cut-off score policy of any kind, with or without combination formulas. Further, scores from the different measures should not be compared, because each measure is scaled separately.

Summing GRE verbal and quantitative scores, or any other summing variation, hides the differences between the applicants. Summing the scores, then arbitrarily applying a minimum combined score may eliminate qualified candidates from the applicant pool. GRE tests provide measures of certain types of developed abilities and achievement, reflecting educational and cultural experience over a long period. Special care is required in interpreting the GRE score of students who may have had educational and cultural experiences somewhat different from those of the traditional majority.

Departments of education administration and graduate schools must look closely at the three individual areas of the GRE (i.e., verbal, quantitative, and analytical) and consider "weighting" areas felt to be more related to success in education leadership programs. It is reasonable and expected that weighting would vary (and rightfully so) from community to community and the philosophy of independent faculty. Along with the GRE program, the authors issue a caution: Weighting a particular component, given a program's emphasis on particular skills is only appropriate when based upon empirical evidence, such as a validity study to establish an appropriate weight for each measure (GRE, 2001).

Finding 2

Data published in the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Guide reveal that students entering education administration preparation programs from 1996 to 1999 attained GRE scores ranking third from the bottom when compared with forty-one graduate fields. Compared with seven specific education majors, education administration ranked second from the bottom in verbal reasoning, third from the bottom in quantitative reasoning, and second from the bottom in analytical reasoning.

The report begins by showing the data in relationship to "intended broad graduate major fields." These data are based on the performance of seniors and non-enrolled college graduates who tested between October 1, 1996, and September 30, 1999. Please note that the data represents "intended majors," meaning examinees responding to the department code question. Examinees responding "Undecided" are not included in these data. Table 2 displays the results of candidates for education programs compared to six other broad major fields (most Business majors take the GMAT, resulting in a low N).

Table 2

GRE Percentage Distribution of Scores Within Broad Major Fields

	Verbal			Quantitative			Analytical		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Life Science	116,620	463	95	116,598	555	116	116,487	560	120
Physical Science	39,760	494	118	39,760	675	105	39,750	613	123
Engineering	46,823	470	114	46,824	703	83	46,755	603	120
Social Science	86,709	482	105	86,691	535	123	86,632	555	125
Humanities	43,287	538	111	43,258	541	120	43,255	577	123
Education	36,606	447	94	36,603	511	118	36,560	534	123
Business	6,788	440	102	6,788	544	143	6,781	530	135

Table 3 displays the results of candidates in education administration programs compared to all others in the broad major field of education.

Table 3

GRE Percentage Distribution of Scores In Education and Education Administration

	Verbal			Quantitative			Analytical		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Education	36,606	447	94	36,603	511	118	36,560	534	123
Education Admin.	2,655	425	87	2,655	496	119	2,655	513	127

Disaggregating the data further, Table 4 displays the results of candidates for education administration programs compared to other specific majors in education.

Table 4

GRE Percentage Distribution of Scores In Education Administration and Education Majors

	Verbal			Quantitative			Analytical		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Secondary Ed.	5,440	486	96	5,440	562	119	5,440	577	119
C and I	1,960	466	98	1.960	534	120	1,960	554	126
School Psch.	1,915	454	84	1,915	511	107	1,915	544	113
Ed Psyc.	1,117	451	95	1,117	510	118	1,117	534	119
Elementary Ed.	5,820	442	88	5,820	505	108	5,820	534	117
Special Ed.	2,320	432	87	2,320	484	106	2,320	516	119
Education Admin.	2,655	425	87	2,655	496	119	2,665	513	127
Physical Ed.	1,744	400	76	1,744	490	108	1,744	504	116

Discussion

Though not convinced of a direct relationship between GRE scores and leadership potential, the authors do think there is cause for concern in the data reported above. Certainly, other broad fields such as the sciences and engineering perhaps attract candidates with higher scores in quantitative reasoning than would education administration. However, with some evidence of a relationship between effective leadership and verbal skills such as used in oral and written communication (Coleman, Copeland, & Adams, 2001), one questions the revelation that education administration verbal reasoning scores are ranked next to last when compared to candidates in all other broad graduate fields. Further concern relates to the low scores of education administration candidates even in relationship to other education majors. When

compared to other education majors, education administration scores ranked second from the bottom in verbal reasoning, only above physical education majors. Education administration scores ranked third from the bottom in quantitative reasoning, ahead of special education and physical education majors. Education administration scores ranked second from the bottom in analytical reasoning, ahead of only physical education majors.

An additional concern relates to the lower scores in education as a broad field. This certainly has implications for teacher education as well as education administration. Education as a broad major field falls significantly below all other broad fields with the exception of business in the areas of verbal and analytical reasoning (note that the majority of business majors take the GMAT exam). The authors emphasize similar concern in this regard, due to the fact that we are also faced with a serious shortage of teachers across the nation. The same question exists: Will we sacrifice quality for quantity sustaining the status quo, or more serious, lower standards of admission and selection as we strive to fill the large number of vacancies existing in teacher education AND school administration.

Recommendations

Evidence exists indicating a somewhat positive correlation between GRE scores and success in graduate school (ETS, 2001). However, more research is in order to investigate the possible relationship between higher scores in particular components of the GRE (e.g., verbal and/or analytical) and leadership potential. Perhaps the problem is more in the area of recruitment than selection. University preparation programs should initiate adequate resources for recruiting candidates of high quality and possessing characteristics of effective leadership. For example, a stronger relationship between

university preparation programs and practicing school administrators would help identify candidates with leadership potential and/or experience.

The traditional practice of requiring letters of recommendation might be replaced with agreements from practicing administrators to "sponsor" or "support" candidates in education administration programs. Taking such commitments to sponsor, mentor, and support in addition to respectable GRE scores all seem to be a more logical step in the selection process.

Graduate Record Examination scores are a valuable component of the graduate application package in education administration preparation programs. We emphasize the importance of combining this information with other sources to provide departments of education administration with important information about the skills and abilities of applicants.

Finding 3

Only 27 (6%) of the university preparation programs studied require personal interviews as part of the selection process. An additional 9 (2%) include a "potential" interview, decided after a review of other application material. The remaining universities (414) require no form of personal contact with candidates preceding acceptance (or rejection). Only 1 university in the study requires assessment center activities of candidates *before* admission (i.e., oral and written performances based on selected scenarios and situations).

Discussion

Existing research suggests that selection procedures and practices are often unsystematic and unstructured (Pounder & Young, 1996) and have weak predictive

power. Even universities with rigorous and highly structured criteria often find they are not able to predict leadership potential to the degree they would prefer, unless their selection criteria includes "significant behavior-based measures" (p. 300). Pounder (1989) suggests that typical screening criteria used in selection systems are "proxy measures" (p. 300) for the desired leadership behavior.

The use of the interview has increased slightly over the last decade as a more reliable strategy in identifying potential school administrators. Though its use in the selection process in university preparation programs remains relatively small (approximately 6%), the interview is not as expensive or labor intensive as the assessment center activity. It is encouraging to discover the emergence of the *situational interview,* a strategy that immerses the candidate into a real-life environment.

Research has shown the interview to contain several weaknesses. Selection decisions based upon the interview reveal disproportionate rates of selection between minority and majority members. Decisions tend to be made in the first few minutes of the interview with the remainder of the interview being used to validate or justify the original decision.

In many cases, questions are not *job related*, resulting in the potential for racial and gender stereotypes throughout the interview process. In addition, evidence reveals a tendency to give negative information more weight than positive information. For the interview process to be effective, interviewers must: (1) avoid asking questions unrelated to the job, (2) avoid making quick decisions about the applicant, (3) avoid stereotyping applicants, (4) avoid giving too much weight to a few characteristics, and (5) maintain

consistency in the questions asked. Because of these confounding variables, little evidence of the validity exists of the interview used as a selection procedure.

Though the interview is considered by many as the most important administrator screening tool (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Bryant, 1978; Pounder & Young, 1996; Schmitt & Cohen, 1990), candidate interviews are often unstructured, informal, and inconsistent. Even when highly structured guidelines are followed, it is difficult to predict future job performance, unless the selection system focuses on behavior-based measures (e.g., situational interviews).

Recommendations

Several have suggested that leadership must be viewed more as a performing art than a set of skills, competencies, and knowledge (Sarason, 1999; Vaill, 1989). Graduate schools in the performing arts certainly require traditional criteria such as previous grades, test scores, and interviews. But no school accepts a student without an audition – they want to see how the student *performs*. Auditions are not interviews. They are samples of behavior displayed under real-life situations. IHEs cannot afford to admit individuals into preparation programs without some form of audition that offers a basis for assessing how they will interact with children, parents, and teachers in situations calling for inventiveness, spontaneity, and sensitivity (Sarason, 1999).

Interviews (and to some extent assessment center activities) usually focus on a predetermined set of questions or hypothetical situations and only allow the candidate to tell how and why or what he or she *would do* to handle the situation. Auditions, on the other hand, immerse the candidate into a real-life environment of education administration and require the candidate to *actually demonstrate (perform) a behavior.*

What a person says he or she will do is far from correlated with what a person actually does when confronted with the situation (Sarason, 1999). As in the performing arts, auditions used in administrative recruitment and selection need not require a perfect performance – we realize we are observing untrained individuals. But does the candidate display the "qualities" necessary or the "potential" for performing effectively with children, parents, and teachers?

Auditions are not without disadvantage or weakness. Similar to assessment center activities, the audition is time-consuming and labor intensive, especially if required of every candidate to education administration programs. As with the interviews and assessment center activities, the audition sets the stage for potentially overly subjective judgment and decisions by university personnel. Program leaders must strive for consistent evaluations and objective decisions based on quality of performance and display of leadership potential.

Departments of education administration might consider the use of an emerging practice (Creighton & Jones, 2001) of *weighting formulas,* allowing for all selection criteria to be considered but giving advantage to criteria requiring a display of behavior-based performance. Such a formula might look as shown in Table 5:

Table 5

Weighting of Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria	**Weight Given to Decision**
GRE Scores	10 %
GPA	10 %
Writing Samples	5 %
Letters of Support/Sponsor	10 %
Interview	10 % (20 % if *situational*)
Assessment center Activity	20 %
Audition	25 %

Auditions provide an opportunity to observe the candidate in a realistic school environment. For example, auditions can focus on: (1) an unscheduled meeting with a hostile parent, (2) talking with a student contemplating suicide, (3) taking a phone call from an irate parent, or (4) presenting a report of declining standardized test scores to the board of education. A more specific example of auditions is displayed in Appendix A.

Finding 4

Approximately 180 universities (40%) studied require a teaching credential or teaching experience as a requirement to admission. A majority of 270 universities (60%) allow a candidate to complete a Masters Degree in Education Administration without satisfying the teaching requirement for state certification of principal or superintendent. In other words, the candidate can complete the degree but lack the requirement of

teaching experience, which is two-to-three years in most states. The university grants the degree, but not verification of meeting the requirements for state certification.

Discussion

This finding is truly an alarming one, indeed. The prevailing question is: What knowledge base or experience does this candidate bring to such courses as school law, school finance, supervision of instruction, school personnel, the principalship, and dealing with students of special needs? This candidate lacks first-hand knowledge and understanding of the school setting, students, teachers, administrators, and instruction. In these cases, why would we assume learning acquired in the university program can be "put on hold" while the candidate completes the required two or three years of teaching experience in the classroom? This situation again, draws attention to the fact that departments of education administration and its professors likely have to "adjust" or "water-down" the curriculum to fit the needs of students who lack any classroom or other school site experience.

Universities permitting candidates to complete education administration preparation in this manner not only are doing a disservice to the candidates themselves, but also a disservice to the teachers, students, and community members in the schools these aspiring principals will someday attempt to lead.

Some universities argue that if the candidates are currently in their first or second year of teaching, candidates will satisfy the state certification requirement by the time they graduate. This argument perhaps draws attention to the university's willingness to sacrifice quality of candidate in the name of enrollment quotas and cash flow. In

addition, this situation gives support to the authors' contention that the quality and rigor of instruction seeks the level of experience and intelligence of its candidates.

Recommendations

This practice contributes to the growing problem of placing excessive numbers of candidates with education administration degrees in non-administrative positions. Many remain in the classroom as classroom teachers. This result in itself - or in isolation - is not the issue. The concern relates to the amount of time between the granting of a degree and the actual certification of the candidate. If several years go by, the candidate brings outdated knowledge and skills (or even the lack of same caused by the time factor) to the leadership position.

It is encouraging to discover that some states are addressing this potential problem. California, for example, requires three years of teaching experience to enter a master's program in education administration. Upon completing the masters in education administration, the candidate is granted a provisional certification, and allowing three years to secure a position in school administration. If an administrative position is not secured in that time, the candidate is denied professional certification and required to return to the university for updated and current professional coursework.

The authors strongly recommend that the practice of allowing candidates without the appropriate teaching experience to enter education administration programs be discontinued. Until further studies and research indicate otherwise, the profession believes a relationship exists between effective school leadership and a limited amount of classroom teaching experience or other school-site experience.

Finding 5

Eighty percent of the universities (360) studied provide for a conditional admissions policy. Though the conditions vary, most state a conditional acceptance if GRE scores and/or GPA are below normal acceptance levels. In other words, if a candidate's GRE scores are below acceptance, the university accepts the candidate conditionally, based upon a retake of the GRE, and/or the completion of 6-9 credits with a 3.0 or better average.

Discussion

The authors are not in any way suggesting this policy is inappropriate and does not provide marginal students a chance to succeed. The point of argument seeks to address the nature of the condition: The condition again is related to success in graduate school, rather than an indication of leadership potential. What is the relationship between a student maintaining a B average in the first 6-9 credits (which are usually core courses and rarely courses in school administration) and potential in principal preparation programs. Perhaps these variables may relate to success in graduate school, but evidence points to little relevance to effective leadership characteristics and potential.

Habick (2001) suggests that from ETS's perspective, there is no reason for a candidate to take the examination the second time, if he or she prepared properly. Research conducted by ETS on test results of examinees repeating the GRE examination for a second time reveals only a slight increase in scores. The authors' experience at five universities includes no evidence of candidates scoring significantly higher (usually 2-10 points, combined) on an additional try. The practice of requiring candidates to take the

examination a second or third time places unnecessary stress on the candidate, along with additional expense, with little evidence the candidate will score any differently.

In the authors' experience with several university preparation programs, they have yet to witness a rejection of candidate at the master's level in education administration. Again, the authors are not lobbying for rejection of candidates, but instead argue for high quality, rigorous, and fair selection procedures. Looking at any other rigorous selection procedures (e.g., other graduate fields), decisions are made rejecting candidates with questionable admissions characteristics. A repeated theme: The education administration profession has a reputation for being a refuge for mediocre candidates.

Conclusions

Effective education leadership programs consist of both quality of program and quality of entering candidates. In a time when we are focusing on higher standards for education leadership programs, reform in university preparation programs is not likely, and will not begin, until we insist on candidates with strong potential for school leadership.

Final Thoughts

Jones:

When I was fourteen I lived in a small farming community. A local farmer persuaded me to milk his dairy herd while he took an extended Christmas vacation. I was supposed to milk thirty head of cows each morning and evening for a month. About the beginning of the second week the amount of milk production began to decline. Instead of sixty gallons of milk per milking I was only receiving 45-50. I was concerned that the farmer would be angry with me for decreased production, so I added water to the milk to

make it look like everything was fine. Even though I felt guilty, no one could see the difference, and I believed that my deception was unsuspected. In fact, the farmer checked the poundage charts from the driver upon his return and seemed fairly happy with my efforts. Eventually, though, the milk-fat test results (ones I didn't know were kept) were reported to him. He discovered that the quality was way down, and figured out what I had been doing. For a short while inferior quality work was covered up, and I looked good. It was not until later that the results of my cover-up were discovered and I had to face the reality of the situation.

The analogy, it seems to me, is clear. At IHEs a balance exists between faculty and students. Poor quality—whether from the educator or the student—creates an imbalance that leads to failure. On one hand education needs high-quality instructors and professionals who can deliver an educational product that is excellent. On the other hand, education needs top-rate students who can understand and utilize this excellent information. Without either of these, failure abounds.

Creighton:

It is interesting to note the heavy emphasis on quality of university program (e.g., NCATE, ISLLC, NPBEA) with an accompanying absence of emphasis on quality of candidates selected to education administration programs. Only in the NPBEA standards document currently "in progress," is there a mention of rigorous selection criteria (e.g., input standards). Why is it assumed that high quality effective administrators can be produced by university programs without *first* attracting and selecting candidates with existing potential of school administration and leadership? And why do IHEs still utilize

the common non-behavior-based selection criteria that show no evidence of relationship with leadership skills, knowledge, or dispositions?

Along with existing selection criteria, university programs must give thought to considering more behavioral-based criteria to better identify candidates with leadership potential. Until all involved parties seriously address the selection of candidates with strong analytical ability, high administrative potential, and demonstrated success in teaching, the education profession will continue to be a refuge for mediocre candidates.

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APPENDIX A

Auditioning in Education Administrative Preparation Programs: An Application

Auditions were a required component of the principal preparation program at a mid-western university from Fall semester 1997 through Spring semester 2000. During that time, a total of 225 master's students preparing for the principalship went through an audition process. Though the process was used in this case as a way to identify strengths and weaknesses of enrolled candidates, the intent of this paper is to suggest and recommend that auditions be implemented as an additional strategy for selection of candidates before they are accepted into preparation programs.

As part of the course entitled "The Principalship," students were required to attend a full-day (Saturday) session consisting of a variety of auditioning activities. No individual names were used during the day; students began the day as a hypothetical principal and were identified only by a number (e.g., A-1, A-2, A-3, etc.). Activities were scheduled in several rooms and individual offices, and in a manner whereby each student progressed through the activities during the day.

Evaluators and judges were practicing teachers, principals, superintendents, university professors, and students. Each candidate's performance was judged and reviewed by at least three evaluators. The following example of audition activities used during 1997-2000 comes from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management's Project-Based Learning Project (Bridges, 1994).

Audition #1, Irate Parent Phone Call

Students answered a phone call from an angry parent at scheduled times in a location previously announced (e.g., private office). Evaluators performed the role of the irate parent making the call from another office, and accompanied by two additional evaluators. The parent script follows:

> You are Mr. Robert Wills and want your son transferred out of Mrs. Jones' room.
>
> Your son is Joe, an 8th grader.
>
> You have aspirations for him to attend college and it is important that he do well in school and learn.
>
> Your son Joe is not learning anything in Mrs. Jones' class – it is a total waste of time.
>
> You want your son transferred to Mrs. Johnson; Joe likes her and learned a lot from her when he had her last year.
>
> There must be other parents who feel the same way – have you heard from any of them? What are you going to do about it?
>
> Indicate you don't care if the principal denies the request.
>
> Your son Joe is a special case, and the principal better reconsider.
>
> If he doesn't transfer Joe, he will hear from you. You mean business.
>
> And you intend to talk with the Board President and Superintendent.

The candidate's responses are listened to on a speaker phone allowing the evaluators to hear the conversation. Both the irate parent and the candidate are in the privacy of individual offices, and the candidate is in no way identified by name. How is the candidate's audition evaluated?

The evaluation form consists of administrative constructs and descriptors taken from NAESP, NASSP, and NPBEA assessment documents used in professional assessment center simulations. A completed assessment form used in the irate parent phone call audition is shown in Table 1.

The important issue, as with auditions in the performing arts, is not a perfect performance necessarily, but whether or not the candidate possesses the important qualities required in the handling of an irate parent phone call. You will notice that additional comments focus on constructive criticism and allow the candidate to reflect on areas of improvement. The assessment obviously involves subjective decisions by the evaluators. These decisions, however, are based on many years of experience of practicing teachers, administrators, and university faculty. The point is that our profession is currently depending excessively on objective data (test scores and grade averages) when accepting candidates into principal preparation programs. Sarason (1999) argues that selecting only on the basis of conventional objective data is not justifiable on moral and educational grounds. He continues by making an analogy to the performing arts: "if you want to predict who will make a good actor, you have to see them act, keeping in mind that you are observing an amateur" (p. 99).

Audition #1 – Discussion

The real strength of the audition provides an additional (and perhaps more authentic) measurement of one's ability to perform an actual task from the school administrator's day. The interview certainly addresses what a candidate "might do" in a particular situation, but the audition begins to focus on the issue of what the candidate "will actually do" in a real-life situation. The point here, again, is not to substitute the audition for the

interview but to include both in the overall assessment of potential for school leadership in perspective and aspiring candidates.

We are beginning to view leadership less and less as consisting of quantifiable characteristics measured by objective test scores (GRE) and good grades in academic courses (GPA). However, no one would suggest that low GPA and GRE scores are characteristics of effective educational leaders. These criteria have their place but seem to be part of a larger picture.

Evidence continues to mount indicating educational administration is less objective and "more dependent on the comings and goings of personalities," says Gary Wills (1994) in his best-selling book, Certain Trumpets, about the nature of leadership. If we desire to (and I suggest we must) measure the complex components of this personality in leadership situations, it seems that the audition more appropriately and accurately provides such a measurement. Do GRE scores and GPA allow us to consider this important leadership characteristic? I suggest not. At least, the audition should be included in the variety of selection strategies used in identifying the "brightest and most capable" for our educational administration preparation programs.

Table 1. Irate Parent Call Assessment Form

Student Identification Number_____A-1_____

Communication "look-fors"	1	2	3	4	5
Conveys ideas and opinions succinctly			X		
Expresses clear and concise language			X		
Checks for understanding		X			
Uses appropriate language			X		
Exhibits sensitivity to parent's concerns		X			
Renders a timely and appropriate decision		X			
Displays appropriate listening skills		X			

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

1. Appeared in a hurry to get the parent off the phone.
2. Be careful about putting the responsibility on the parent to check these issues out – that's why he's calling you.
3. Be more explicit about what steps you will take.
4. Strive to show empathy to the parent and at the same time be supportive of the teacher.

Note: The administrator constructs and descriptors listed above are to be used as "look-fors" as the audition activity unfolds. Additional comments will help with the assessment of the individual. Observation should be rated on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating little evidence and 5 representing strong evidence.